



Quarterly Progress Report
OMEP Regional Partnership for Culture and Development (RPCD)
Program

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Submitted by: Christina Blumel
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The OMEP Regional Partnership for Culture and Development Program (RPCDP) was awarded as a cooperative agreement to FHI 360 on September 22, 2010. This is the 4th quarterly report and covers the period from July 1st to September 30th, 2011.

The purpose of the Program is to “support the dissemination of regional research on development issues, share best practices and lessons learned from international development programs, and provide a forum for knowledge sharing and intellectual innovation.”

Contents

| | |
|---|---|
| Overview | 2 |
| Novation and Operational Issues..... | 2 |
| Regional Conference..... | 3 |
| Concerns about Security | 3 |
| Budget Realignment..... | 3 |
| Portal Site, Digital Library, and Research Requests | 4 |
| Administrative and Staffing Issues..... | 4 |
| Chief of Party | 4 |
| Establishing relationships with FHI/Egypt and CDS | 5 |
| | 1 |

| | |
|--|---|
| Staffing | 5 |
| Procurement of Furniture and Equipment | 5 |
| Cairo Office Location..... | 5 |
| Conclusion..... | 6 |

Overview

In July 2011 AED programs were acquired by FHI and were novated by USAID to new FHI 360 organization. With this action, the suspension was no longer in effect for this cooperative agreement. As a result of this change, the Program moved forward address establishing the home office, including leasing office space, acquiring furniture and computers, and completing hiring for all positions. In addition, the Program went through a lengthy budget realignment process, and began work on a regional conference to be held in Morocco in November. By the end of the quarter, the Program had made significant progress in all of these areas, including hiring both an interim CoP and then the permanent CoP for the Program.

Novation and Operational Issues

In July, agreements were novated to FHI 360, and the suspension ended for the Program, This enabled the Program to move forward as FHI 360. In Egypt, FHI has worked under the auspices of a local partner, the Center for Development Services (CDS). After examining all options, in order to establish a relationship with CDS and to unify the organizational presence in Egypt, a decision was taken at the corporate level to engage CDS sponsorship for FHI 360's efforts with the RPCD Program.

In addition, FHI did not have current registration in other Program countries in the region. These cases included West Bank, Lebanon, Jordan, Morocco and Yemen. In addition, in West Bank and Morocco, previously established projects were in the process of closing out. This limited the ability of FHI 360 to bring on country coordinators in other projects. As a result of these circumstances, it was determined that the best and most expeditious way to move forward to use local partners or administrative service providers, so that taxes could be withheld and benefits paid to local Country Coordinators. In Jordan, the existence of a continuing FHI360 project has allowed the sub-lease of office space as well as the hiring of coordinators on the payroll of this project. This may also be possible in Yemen with an extension of the BEST Yemen project. In Egypt, the decision was taken to work with CDS as a local partner.

The additional costs associated with bringing on local staff in this fashion were included in the budget realignment. However, these arrangements will also necessitate continued support from home office operations and finance staff, as payments for this service must be processed through the home office.

Regional Conference

As a result of consultation with the AOTR and the Middle East Bureau's senior advisor on culture and development in the region, Program home office staff began to engage in and support a regional youth conference. This role for FHI 360 was later defined as logistics support of the conference. Originally envisioned in Tunisia, the conference location was changed to Morocco. Set for November 13th to 17th, it involves youth and civil society participants and speakers from 8 countries in the region.

The RPCD home office team worked closely with the OMEP office team and AOTR to arrive at a mutual scope of work and budget that could be approved for the conference. The two teams successfully worked through the details associated and arrived at an agreed scope that has continued to guide efforts going forward.

In preparation for the conference Amy West from the home office and Lebanon Country Coordinator Bouchra Doueihi supported the creation of a Facebook page to solicit participation from youth for the conference. In addition, the web team created a page on the RPCD site that applicants could go to submit an application online.

The time required to complete the budget realignment to accommodate the conference was lengthy, and was not complete until September, when the final budget realignment was submitted and approved. Although Program staff moved to secure hotel accommodations, an additional partial delay was also encountered when the original firm asked to provide these services was unable to provide documentation to meet USAID requirements. As a result, an RFP was executed to contract with a local firm in Morocco, the site of the conference. A contract was executed with MTDS (a firm with a base in Morocco) in September. Following this development, it was possible to continue with conference logistical support under the supervision of FHI 360.

Concerns about Security

During September, concerns were raised by the interim Chief of Party that the team was being observed during their meetings in public locations. In addition to this scrutiny, the interim CoP experienced direct questions from a stranger that revealed his knowledge of her Armenian citizenship. Concerns about the situation resulted in consultation with both the Global Security Advisor for FHI 360, as well as the AOTR for the Program. The interim CoP was able to meet with the EXO for the Mission regarding this situation. The team continued to meet on the hotel premises, rather than in other public locations (cafes) and at the original FHI office in Garden City, in order to respond to the situation.

Budget Realignment

In addition to requested conference funds, a number of changes were requested by the Program to the budget. These included the designation of funds to work with a local partner and hire country coordinators,, the need for continued support for the web team to transition the Portal site to the

field, the approval of allowances for an expat chief of party and commensurate salary level, and an additional trip for FHI360's security advisor. The realignment was approved in September, including the additional designation of funds for the Morocco conference.

Portal Site, Digital Library, and Research Requests

Significant progress was made on the portal site and digital library. In addition to completing the pages and content for the core pages, the team began to upload the documents that were provided by the AOTR for potential inclusion in the digital library. A collection development policy was developed and reviewed by the digital librarian and the head of information services for AED, and the web team designed an easy to use interface for Program staff to use in uploading documents to the Library. A comment feature was also included for the News section.

In addition, the web team worked with a designer on a new template for the site that included more graphics and changes in font. This design will also be reflected in Program publications as well.

In addition, the Program responded to a research request from OMEP, to find existing best practices from organizations in the region on youth entrepreneurship. The team produced a paper as well as an inventory of current programs.

Administrative and Staffing Issues

Chief of Party

With the loss of a chief of party candidate to a longer term commitment to the Ghana Mission, the Program decided to bring on an experienced interim CoP, Anoush Yedigaryan, to provide start up support in Cairo. The Interim Chief of Party arrived in Cairo in August to initiate the office start up and staff hiring process. During this period, she started regular work meetings with the earlier engaged local consultants. This team (the Operations and Communications manager, the Finance Manager and Interim CoP) continued the work needed to get office operations finalized. The Interim COP also started project introductions in the local community with the partner organization. Meetings with AOTR and other OMEP staff took place to establish initial vision and understanding which later were developed in the more engaged work processes.

Meanwhile, the Program successfully located a permanent Chief of Party candidate, Matthew Pietz, after having broadened the field to include expatriate candidates. Both the interim and long-term positions were fully advertised. In addition, local contacts in the development community outside of FHI 360 were notified of the opportunity. Four finalist candidates were considered for the Interim position, and five finalists were considered for the long-term position. The program successfully hired the long-term CoP on September 26, 2011. It is anticipated that there will be overlap between the interim and the long-term CoP to manage the opening of the office and orientation of staff.

Establishing relationships with FHI/Egypt and CDS

Initial and stronger contacts were established with the Country Office of FHI in Egypt, as well as the Center for Development Services (CDS). As CDS acts as a local representative agency for FHI in Egypt, discussions were held on how CDS could represent RPCD as well and what that would entail in terms of project implementation and representation. An agreement was signed with CDS to provide representation, as well as contracting and payment services for RPCD. This allowed the RPCD Program to move forward with office set up, the office lease, and procurement of equipment and furniture.

Staffing

From the end of August to mid-September, intensive screening and interviewing for the vacant positions took place. Both the interim COP and the Operations and Communications manager were engaged in this process, and conducted over 40 interviews of the shortlisted candidates for the positions of Research Analysts (3), Editor/Translator, and the Program Operations Associate.

As a result of the suspension, previously located candidates in Egypt and elsewhere were no longer available. However, the Operations and Communications manager and Finance Manager continued their roles with the Program. Also, a candidate for the IT Manager who had been recommended and located during earlier searches was hired as well. Consulting agreements were signed with these three people which that allowed them to work on the project up to a full time engagement, as necessity arose.

In terms of country coordinator staff, the Program approached previously identified candidates with offers. However, it was necessary in the case of Jordan and Iraq to work with a local FHI 360 project to re-advertise the position. By the end of September, two country coordinators were hired in Morocco and Lebanon, and candidates were identified for all other countries and were in the process of being selected for final interviews with local offices. Offers went forward in September for Jordan and Iraq, while in person interviews with local FHI 360 staff are being finalized in West Bank and Yemen. In addition, office space was successfully leased for the Jordan and Iraq coordinators.

Procurement of Furniture and Equipment

Full procurement for the necessary furniture took place during the reported period. Three quotes were obtained for the furniture list, and based on the cost and item analysis, a recommendation was developed to purchase all furniture with exception of the Conference Meeting desks and reception area.

Equipment specifications were finalized in collaboration with the home office and procurement for equipment purchase was initiated.

Cairo Office Location

Based on the extensive search and analysis conducted by the staff, an office location was finalized in Zamalek. Preliminary negotiations were conducted with the landlord and possible neighbors in order to make final decision and acquire a lease for the office space.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Program is looking forward to moving ahead with a fully staffed and established office, as well as a full complement of country coordinators. Work on the Morocco conference and the attendance of the CoP at the conference will be very helpful in initiating a cordial working relationship with Mission staff, and will serve to further the introduction of the Program to Missions in the region. In addition, the scheduling of a Kick Off meeting with OMEP staff as well as representatives from the Missions will allow the Program to continue to reach out to serve the Missions, in conjunction with the OMEP office.